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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000510

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SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: LEADER OF OPPOSITION OULD DADDAH SEES  
CONTINUED DOWNWARD SPIRAL

Classified By: DCM Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: Opposition leader Ahmed Ould Daddah continues to see fraud in the July 18 presidential elections even as he remains at a loss to explain how. He regrets that the U.S. -- "the last hope for Mauritania" -- has accepted a mechanical definition of democracy and opted for security over real democracy. He welcomed possible U.S. initiatives to support the fragile institutions of democracy. He sees no political program for Aziz other than staying in power. Without political vision, the Aziz government will continue a downward economic and security spiral ending inevitably in another coup. End Summary

12. (C) They stole it, but they were clever doing it: DCM met August 11 with defeated presidential candidate Ahmed Ould Daddah in the first embassy contact since the July 18 elections. A dejected Ould Daddah questioned the U.S. position finding that Aziz had passed the technical criteria of having won the elections, insisting the Aziz camp had committed massive fraud but adding "they did it very well." While speaking briefly of chemically altered ballots that changed from "Ould Daddah" to "Aziz" votes after being put in the ballot box (noting that unfortunately they had been unable to get their hands on a single specimen of the 1.2 million ballots printed), Ould Daddah based most of his argument of fraud on percentages for Aziz that just seemed too consistent across voting precincts and far above what any prior reading would have suggested possible. Despite international recognition, Ould Daddah said, "this is not a democracy -- it is just a continuation of military government." He was disappointed that the U.S. had accepted the results but added, "I understand why." He reserved his true antipathy for the French who he saw as having abandoned democracy for misplaced self interest.

13. (C) A Non-State: Ould Daddah said that Aziz "a petty soldier" and his cohorts had succeeded in gaining power but that Mauritania lacks any real government. He accused Aziz of having no political ideology and no program to face Mauritania's multiple challenges. Instead, he saw Aziz driven by narrow self interest and, above all, by the desire to stay in power. He added that he was extremely upset by the August 8 suicide bombing in front of the French Embassy which he saw as the first step in a downward spiral that could make Mauritania another Somalia in two years. He added, The French, and you to a lesser extent, are deceiving yourself if you think you can tackle terrorism with Aziz." While accepting that military and intelligence liaison could

mitigate some of the immediate threats of AQIM, he noted "Mauritanians used to be peaceful -- there were no Mauritanian terrorists ten years ago" arguing that the roots of radicalization could only be addressed through development and good governance. Stating again that Aziz had no political vision beyond his survival, Ould Daddah saw him incapable of addressing -- indeed, more likely to provoke -- the underlying radicalization of Mauritanian society.

¶4. (C) Gresham's Law: Ever the economist, Ould Daddah lamented that Aziz would have neither the vision nor interest to secure Mauritania's fragile economy. He predicted ever more corruption (even as Aziz' anti-corruption campaign is used to punish enemies) and increased access for narco traffickers. Citing Gresham's Law, Ould Daddah said "bad money" (corruption and drug money) will push out "good money" (legitimate capital and investment in Mauritania). He contended that a good administration that paid attention to costs and invested wisely would be able to overcome the current economic fragility within two years. He still saw hope that Mauritania's resources could some day be properly managed to make it the "Dubai of West Africa."

¶5. (C) Democracy Strategy: Ould Daddah said he remained committed with the FNDD in non-recognition of the Aziz government and that his party would not accept participation in any Aziz government absent a broad agreement on democratic consensus he did not see Aziz giving (Comment: It was reported later in the day that former Abdallahi Prime Minister Waghef had met with President Aziz in an effort to consult with the FNDD about the creation of a new government

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under Prime Minister Laghdaf.) Ould Daddah said the best way to ensure democracy would be to re-do the presidential election but added "I know that's not realistic." He was in favor of new legislative elections before the end of the year to serve as a "counterweight against Aziz" but only if those elections were not rushed, were under the auspices of a new and credible CENI electoral commission, and had full blown international observation -- all things he saw lacking in the rush to presidential elections. Absent new legislative elections, Ould Daddah said his parliamentarians would participate in the legislature using their minority position to challenge the Aziz government. DCM noted that the Embassy hopes to have NDI re-engage with the National Assembly as part of an overall program of supporting fragile democratic institutions including local governments and the media. Ould Daddah welcomed the idea and called also for efforts at civic education (which is, in fact, part of the Mission's pending proposal for remaining FY-09 DA funds).

¶6. (C) Comment: Ould Daddah is perhaps the biggest political loser from the July 18 elections. While his dramatic drop in voter support would be called trickery by Ould Daddah, throughout the year of the coup his party saw defections and Ould Daddah lost the respect of many previous supporters for what was seen as political flip-flopping relative to the coup. Assuming Aziz completes a five year mandate, Ould Daddah will be constitutionally too old to run again. Despite the set backs, DCM found Ould Daddah's party headquarters active as ever. End Comment.  
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